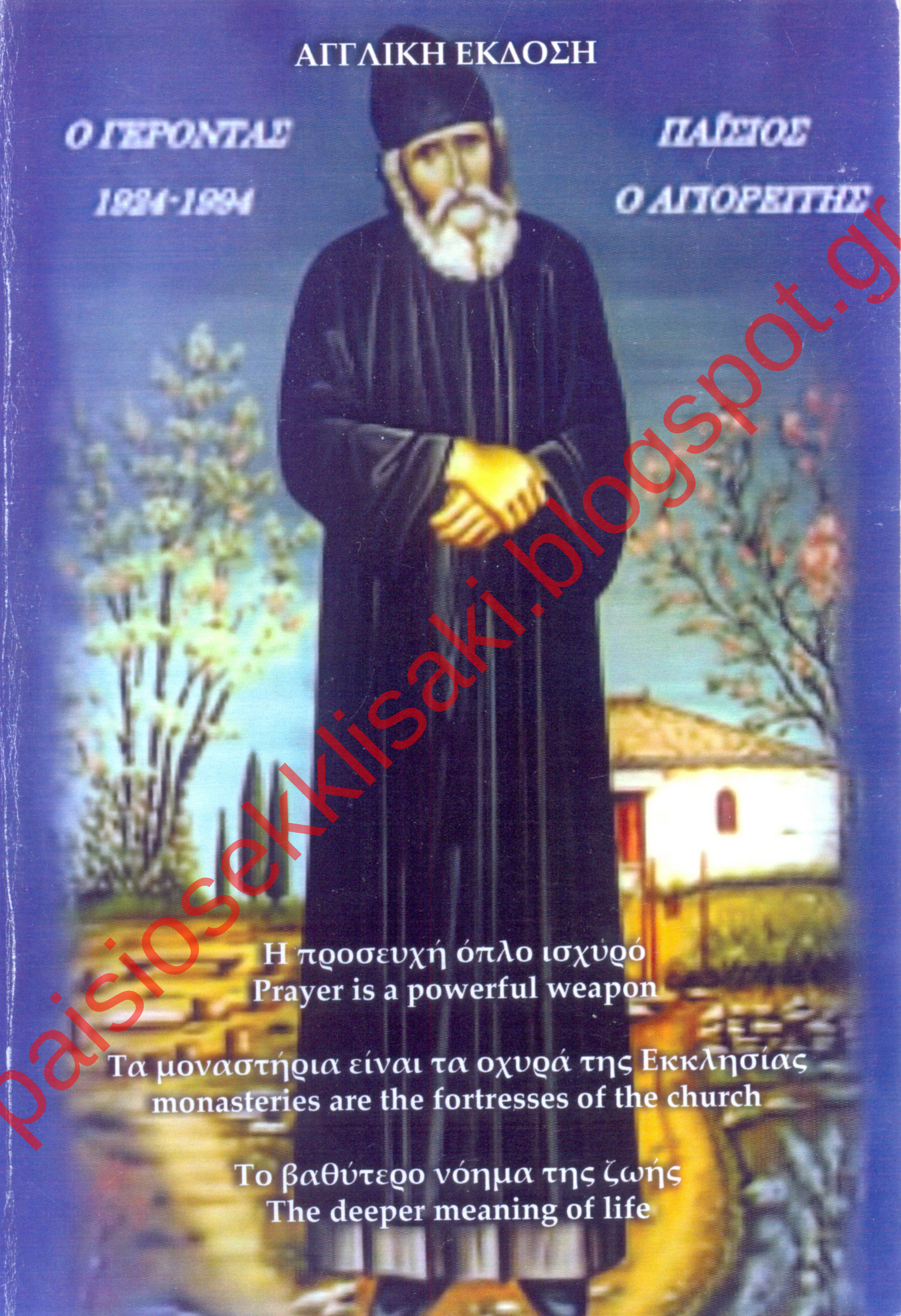
ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

# Ο ΓΕΡΟΝΤΑΣ ΠΑΪΣΙΟΣ
1924-1994 Ο ΑΓΙΟΡΕΙΤΗΣ



Η προσευχή όπλο ισχυρό
Prayer is a powerful weapon

Τα μοναστήρια είναι τα οχυρά της Εκκλησίας
monasteries are the fortresses of the church

Το βαθύτερο νόημα της ζωής
The deeper meaning of life

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## CHAPTER ONE

Η προσευχή, όπλο ισχυρό

### Prayer Is a Powerful Weapon

## CHAPTER TWO

Τα μοναστήρια είναι τα οχυρά της Εκκλησίας

### Monasteries Are the Fortresses of the Church[1]

## CHAPTER THREE

Το βαθύτερο νόημα της ζωής

### The Deeper Meaning of Life

# A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAISIOS

Paisios used to be one of the most enlightened Saint figures in our Church, the last decades. He was born in Pharasa of Cappadocia, in the middle east, on 25 July in 1924 and was baptized and named after Arsenios. His Parents, Prodromos and Evlampia Eznepide, were very devout and had ten children while Arsenios had nine siblings. Arsenios even from his infancy, received the blessing from God to be baptized by a Saint who lived in his area, the Saint Arsenios from Cappadocia. Saint Arsenios predicted the future holiness of the child, he asked his Godmother to name after him Arsenios, telling her distinctively that he wanted a monk to be in his stead, namely to have his name. Almost a month after Arsenios' baptism his family followed the road to Greece where he finally stayed in Konitsa. Arsenios since he was a child had a huge love for Christ and our Virgin Mary and he had a strong desire to be a monk. He loved going to the forest holding a wooden cross, he used to pray. At the age of 21 he joined the army, where he excelled in moral and courage. He always asked to go to the front line and to the most dangerous positions, he wished his own death instead of someone's else death. Many times he run the risk of being killed in order to save somebody else, a comrade-in-arms. When he did his military service he went to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. In 1954 he took monastic vows and was named after Averkios, and later on Paisios. He was a monk in the Monastery Esphigmenou and later on in the Monastery Philotheou. As a monk he had an exemplary obedience while he was trying to help the other monks whenever and however he could. From 1958 to 1964 Father Paisios is not in the Holy Mountain, initially in the area of konitsa where he will support thousands of souls and he will help them to escape from the fallacy of the heretic, while later he goes to the isolated and rough Sina, to Saints' Galactionos and Epistimis. In 1964 he returns to the Holy Mountain. His Elder Father Tihonas, many times during Divine service he saw as he himself confessed, the Herouvim and Serapheim to glorify God. The Elder lived for a short time in the skete of Iviron and Katounakia. After the death of his Elder in 1968 he succeeded him in the cell of The Holy Cross. In conclusion, in 1979 he settled down in the Koutloumousiano cell <<Panagouda>>. Little by little his Holy Figure begins to become known to most pilgrims. The whole day, from east til west, he give advices, consoles, banish care, fill your soul with faith, hope and love for God, while at night he reads letters in tens which people sent them every day and prays to God, being sleepless for people who asked his help.

We heard that the Elder Porfirios (Malakasa), in his great mortification had said the following, for the Elder Paisios: f. Paisios' Grace has greater worth because he acquired it by a hard-fought struggle, while God gave it to me as a gift when I was young in order to help people in need...Saints like f. Paisios are sent to earth by God every 400 years!!!...

In the Holly mountain he led an ascetic's life and he spent there the most years of his life. The gifts that God embellished him with are many. He had the gift of healing (he cured a lot of people of a variety of illnesses, cancers, paralytics from birth and more.), he had the gift of against evil spirits (he cured many, exorcising evil spirits from people who were given a rough time) , he had the gift of prediction (he said to many people facts that will happen in the future in a personal level but he also prophesied of future events of our country to come) , he had the gift of far-sightedness ( he knew someone's heart deeply and purely than the man himself, that's why he gave advices to a nicety and properly and everyone listened to the word he needed to hear), he had the gift of distinction in spirits (he knew to a nicety if a spiritual occurrence was by God or by evil that tried to deceive and mislead), he had distinction(he knew in any case which one was God's will and if he had to reveal it or not. He knew which one was good, right in any case. Even for non spiritual matters).

He had the gift of divinity. From many spiritual experiences he had with Saints, with Angels, with Virgin Mary but also with visions of the unbuilt light, in fact, he became a theologian and knew deeply the Sacraments of God.

These gifts and above all the elder's love, brought people close to him. Hundreds of people visited him in his cell every day. Endless comings and goings. The elder took the pain, the anxiety and the problems from people and gave them back a solution, joy and peace. Wherever it was worthy-he knew and God where and when-intervened miraculously, under God's rule, and solved the unsolved.

The elder Paisios was a gift by God to people. All this reputation was spread by word of mouth, by people who were surprised by his many kindnesses and his wonders... The Elder Paisios was brought out by God Himself.

Thousands were the letters which were sent. The Elder said:<<...or psychological problems or cancer or separated family...one of these three will be the problems...these problems give people a rough time...these kind of things they write to me>>. The Elder felt pain either in person or through letters and took it up self-sacrificed willingly... his heart went out to other people because he loved them. He didn't want and couldn't keep himself aloof when other people suffered. If it was possible he took up people's cross on his shoulder, in order to release them from their cross.

The Elder, while he was curing other people, he didn't asked God to cure him...He wanted to be patient with illnesses. << to make some spiritual money for the old age>> he said amusingly.

The Elder had many illnesses and endured them with bravery and fighting spirit. He felt contempt for pain and laughed at it!...

In 12 July 1994 The Elder Paisios consign his Holy soul peacefully and humbly to The Lord, Who loved so much and served Him since he was young. He was buried in the yard of the hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki.

After his death, The Elder Paisios continues to do wonders. We hope to become known the miraculous events that happened and continue to happen after his death, to glorify God and the faithful to gain advantage from it, but also for the mistrustful who see the words of God to be fulfilled two thousand years ago:<<Whoever believes in me won't die>> and <<Whoever believes in me, ..........>>

So, The elder as faithful servant of Christ, didn't die but lives and does wonders!
May we all have his blessings!

## CHAPTER ONE

Η προσευχή, όπλο ισχυρό

## Prayer Is a Powerful Weapon

### *Much Prayer Is Needed*

In the past, in order to do something, a worldly person would think. If he were a spiritual person, he would think and pray. In our time, even "spiritual" people not only don't pray, they don't even think. In fact, this frequently involves serious matters, and all they do is practice on people. In all circumstances, before we act we should say, "Have I thought about this? Have I prayed about this?" When someone acts without thinking and without praying, he acts satanically. And you often see many Christians acting in a way that doesn't allow God to intervene. They imagine that they can manage everything by themselves. Whereas even an unbeliever may say an occasional "God will provide", the "believer" won't. Someone may have strong objections, for example, to the carnival and try to attack it directly, whereas he can pray and God will pour down such hail that it will scatter everyone and cancel every activity. Or, let's say, some people criticize a bishop and the others make an appeal to the Council of State. But they don't even stop there. They go on to have demonstrations, disturbances,

articles in the newspapers... An endless array of human efforts that leave no room for God to act. They don't resort to prayer, for God to respond through prayer. With humility and prayer all the seemingly unsolvable problems can be corrected.

Today we live in apocalyptic times. It doesn't take a prophet to understand this. Things are moving fast. What awaits us, we don't know. That a crisis is coming is clear from the current situation. And this is one more reason why we must now rely more on prayer and fight evil with prayer. This is the only solution. We must appeal to God to have mercy on His creation – although we are unworthy of His pity. There will be no end to the problems. Everyone will do whatever comes into his head. What Saint Cosmas said will take place: *One will walk for hours to find a human being; and those who survive will be eating with golden spoons*. Of course, some think: "Since the prophecies will be fulfilled anyway, what's the use of prayer?" God sees events unfolding in this manner, but we still pray for some evil to be less harmful and to be limited in scope. That's why it is written in the Gospel that *for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*[1] For example, in a war a miracle takes place through the power of prayer, more people are saved, there are fewer casualties, in which case people are helped spiritually, believe and are transformed in the good sense of the term.

The situation is serious. It is a miracle that the world is still here and hasn't been blown to pieces. May God put His hand upon the world and save it, for the whole world depends on three or four individuals. The fate of the world is in the hands of a few madmen. The proverb says, *The horses kick and the chickens die.* That's how it is. When the great countries fight each other, it's the small countries that suffer injustices. The large nations kick each other and the small ones are destroyed. Much, much prayer is needed to enlighten the great leaders of the world, for, if they want to, they can destroy the world. God can give them a little enlightenment very easily. If God enlightens, someone can give an order and everything changes.

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[1] Cf. Mt 24:22; Mk 13:20.

### *Petitions in Prayer*

– Geronda, with your blessing, tell us a few things for which we should be particularly praying.

– First of all, we should beseech God that our prayer will draw those who are now living and those who will live in the future to devotion to God. In my prayer I say, *Extend your mercy on those who know Thee* and then I add, *and on those who do not know Thee.* I even say, *Lord, save the impious*. (Of course the Church has properly arranged to say, *Lord, save the pious*, for the impious may be cursing the pious for praying for them.) When again the priest says, *For those who have asked us, unworthy though we be, to pray for them,* I like to add and *for those who have not asked us to pray for them*. Because we should pray for those who ask us and for those who don't ask us, for those we know and for strangers, too. There are so many thousands of people who have greater need and more serious problems than those who have asked us to pray for them. We should also pray for those who have suffered injustices, that

justice may prevail, that grace may be given to those in prison that their sufferings may be transformed into opportunities for spiritual help.

When I put wood on the fire, I praise God and say, "My God, provide warmth for those who don't have it." When again I burn the letters people send me – I read them and burn them because they contain private material and personal confessions – I say, "May God burn up all their flaws; may He help them lead a spiritual life and sanctify them." I also make it a habit to ask the Saints to protect the people who bear their name, and the Communion of Saints to protect those without a patron Saint.

– Geronda, which is better, to ask for God's mercy in general, or to refer to specific and concrete requests in accordance with *Ask, and it shall be given you.*[2]

– You should pray in general and say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on those who are suffering in body and in spirit." This prayer includes those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. When someone you know comes to mind, say a prayer for him, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on your servant so-and-so*, and then move on to a prayer for everyone, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon the whole world*. You may, of course, bring to mind someone who is in need and pray a little for that person, but then you should say, *Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us* and be pained for everyone so the train (i.e. the prayer) doesn't leave with only one passenger. We shouldn't get caught up with one person and then be unable to help either ourselves or others with our prayer. For instance, when you pray for a cancer patient, pray for all cancer patients, and add a prayer for all those who have already fallen asleep in the Lord. Or when you encounter some unfortunate person, let your mind and heart reach out immediately to all the unfortunate people and pray for them. As a child I remember a beggar who died outside a Turkish home, ten meters away from our home. His name was Petros. The Turkish woman found him in the morning lying outside her home and nudged him to get up; she then realized he had died. I still remember him in my prayer. How many such "Petros" are there in the world!

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[2] Mt 7:7.

When we think of specific matters and see that our fellow human beings are suffering, our heart is moved, and we benefit from this. Thus, our pained heart can move from specific matters to the more general and provide greater help through prayer of the heart.

It is good for a monk to divide his prayer into three parts: for himself, for the whole world and for those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Even though this division seems fair, nevertheless, he is still showing more care for himself, because he is only one person, whereas all the other living and departed are in the billions.

– Geronda, while rendering service to the monastery, I usually only pray for myself.

– This isn't right. When you pray for yourself in your cell and pray for yourself again outside of your cell, how can your heart be moved and stirred? When there is love, pain and sacrifice, a higher concern enters and sweetens the heart. That way no one forgets to say the Jesus Prayer while working. This way the whole world benefits, and the person who is praying also benefits and experiences spiritual joy. Do your obediences and pray, *Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us*, so everybody may benefit. *Have*

*mercy on us* covers everyone, even those five or six world leaders – however many they may be – upon whom the fate of the whole world depends. Work and pray for those who are also working. Such prayer covers those who are working physically and those who are working spiritually.

There are many who are working and they're working hard. Some are working for the good of the Church and of the State. Others are working to bring about harm; they stay awake searching for ways to destroy the world. Still others band together to find ways to prevent the previous ones from doing evil. Others again work day and night to find solutions to the general problems of the world. Pray then that God may enlighten even the evildoers to do less evil, or prevent them altogether from doing anything evil. Pray that God enlightens the good people to help the world. Pray for those who want to work but cannot because they are sick. Pray for the healthy who need work but cannot find any. Think of the various cases that may exist and pray for their solution. When the mind goes out to all of these people, the heart is stirred by the pain and suffering and then the Prayer becomes prayer of the heart. There are so many people who have a need in the course of the day. There should be no waste of time. From the person who doesn't have a great need for prayer – regardless of whether he thinks he does – one can move on to think of all those whose need is greater. Thus help comes to the one who thought he had a need, because he became the cause for the other person to pray for many.

### *Help Through Prayer*

– Geronda, Saint James says, *The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.*[3] What is meant by *Availeth much in its working*?

– That it is also necessary for someone seeking the prayer of a righteous man to want to be helped, to be saved, and to make an effort too. In other words, someone who wants to benefit from the prayer of a righteous man must have a good disposition. Prayer from the heart is heard; but the recipient must also be receptive. Otherwise, the person who is praying must have the sanctity of Saint Paisios the Great to be able to bring the other person out of hell.[4] So, first pray for those who wish to be saved.

When I ask God in prayer to help in various cases, I say, "My God, may Your help be obvious, so the people may benefit spiritually too; if it cannot be visible, don't help us." Many people are not at all aware what storms God has saved us from, nor do they think of it, so as to praise God. That is why we should ask Christ, *Panaghia*, the Saints to help people, but to make their help perceptible so the people can benefit spiritually from it.

Let's say someone is in danger of falling from some scaffolding and God provides that he be caught, whereas

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[3] Jas 5:16.

[4] In the life of Saint Paisios the Great the following event is related: A negligent novice fell in some sin out of disobedience and later died, before he could repent. God revealed to his Spiritual Father, after persistent prayers, that the soul of the novice will be tormented in Hades until the Day of Judgment, when he would receive the appropriate recompense. The Father then went to Hosios Paisios and asked him to pray for the salvation of his novice. After the fervent prayer of Hosios Paisios, Christ delivered the soul of the unrepentant novice from Hades.

ordinarily he would not have been caught, and be saved. Or he falls somewhere and is not seriously injured. O again he survives an accident. We should pray that thi person understands that God helped and saved him an thus be helped spiritually by recognizing this fact. Someone fell from a bridge and was saved. I told him, "Di you go down to measure the depth?" It is the Saints wh hold us in their hands. A young man to whom I had give a small cross to wear was speeding with his motorcycle he passed in front of a taxi, flipped around and continue on the road, without being harmed at all. Many are spare from harm, but few are those who realize it and men their ways.

– If I pray for someone but he doesn't ask for help will he be helped?

– That depends on many things. First of all, if he wa of good will and was not helped for some reason, we can say that he is entitled to some divine help. Even i others don't pray for him, God will later provide for hi to be helped. But if he himself asks for help, God will intervene earlier and he will be helped earlier; otherwise he will be helped later. With prayer we give God the right to intervene. Normally, when a person asks for help from his heart and says humbly, "Father, pray for me too," i breaks your heart and you can't forget him. Whereas i he says flippantly, "Pray, pray, pull some beads through your fingers for me," it is like saying, "See you!". How can you remember him?

When prayer is offered from the heart, with pain, for the problems of the world, all those who are asking God for help at that time will immediately receive it. I have many concrete examples. Many years ago, a man who was in profound despair wandered across the border, into the Iron Curtain. There, mistaking him for a spy, they seized him, tormented him and put him in prison. While in prison, he prayed. A monk known to me learned of his situation and prayed for him. "My God, I beseech You, free him. This is easy for You to do." After the imprisonment, they called him to explain himself. After this that man found himself on Greek territory. When the Greeks questioned him, he said, "They beat me, they imprisoned me, and asked me to explain myself. After that I don't remember anything. I neither know nor understand how I found myself at the guard-house on the Greek border." This is the power of prayer. Prayer moves God.

It's good for our "wireless" to work constantly, to embrace all the people who are seeking help. In the army, in the Signals Corps, we kept track of the foreign stations, but we also helped our own. We served as a transmitter for our stations that were too far away from headquarters to be heard clearly; we took their signals and transmitted them. There were always two of us working together two shifts. For if only one man was working, he would have had to interrupt and would not be able to help those seeking help, and his signals would not have reached their destination. Such a station, when working constantly, can help those whose signals don't reach their unit. By the same token, one who is bold before God and prays for others serves as an intermediary between those seeking help and God. But what happens when one asks for help and the other has his station closed down, that is, is not praying?

### *The Quality of Prayer Counts*

– Geronda, when we have a serious request, should our prayer be accompanied by fasting?

– That goes without saying; it's a must. Fasting and ascetic struggle are prerequisites for prayer. But for prayer to be proper and effective one must have compassion for others. For it is a rule of many Christians in our time not to want to have any worries. Even retired people who sit around all day don't want to approach an abandoned child, for this requires work and effort, which will disturb their serenity. They will eat, have their coffee and take a walk; they may even go to see a patient in a hospital that has nurses and is well-organized, because this is easy. In other words, again for their own pleasure; for they ease their conscience with the thought that they have done their duty. I have pressured many people to help some poor abandoned children. My pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

Somewhere on the Holy Mountain they had a prayer service for the drought and, instead of rain, a fire broke out! A prayer service for a drought is not like going for a walk. We need to be troubled and pained over the prevailing situation. Can there be any temptation or difficult situation remaining once the monks have prayed fervently from the heart? In spite of the difficult years we are going through, I see in the monasteries a prevailing spirit ... to be happy! Here the world is burning, and we're trying to be happy. People ask us to keep a vigil, for example, to help some sick person, and we chant the festive psalm *Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled* *with good*,[5] and we feel joyful. We are passing our time pleasantly, but, in the meantime, the patient is dying. And they say, "We are keeping a vigil for the sick person." What kind of vigil is that? You are entertaining yourself; that is spiritual entertainment. Sometimes, even when the priest says, *Let us pray for those who are sick*, we don't pray for the sick. We could be of more positive help to the sick if we devoted some time to the Jesus Prayer with the *komboschoini*. I am not saying, of course, that we should do away with the festive vigils prescribed by the liturgical calendar of the Church, but in such cases we can devote a little time to pray fervently one or two rounds with the *komboschoini*, *Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon your servant*.

The main thing is the quality of our prayer. Prayer must be from the heart; it must be said with pain and compassion. What counts more for God is not the quantity of prayer but the quality. The prayer practised in the monasteries has quantity, but this is not enough; it must also have quality. So many hours of prayer by so many people, if it were prayer of the heart, would have changed the world. For this reason, the goal should be for the Services to be so celebrated that they are prayer of the heart. Prayer of the heart not only helps others but also ourselves, because it helps us to acquire inner goodness. When we put ourselves in others' shoes, love then comes naturally, as does compassion, humility, and our gratitude to God with continuous praise, and then prayer for our fellow human beings is acceptable to God and helpful to them.

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[5] Ps 104:28 (Ps 103:28 LXX).

### *"But They Constrained Him"*

– Geronda, my heart remains cold during prayer.

– This is because the mind doesn't send a telegram t the heart. After all, one must do a great deal of work i prayer; one cannot attain from one moment to the nex a steadfast condition of prayer, so that the mind doesn' wander at all. Patience is needed. You see, someon knocks on the door, knocks again, waits, and then th door opens. You seem to want to knock once and ente directly. It doesn't work this way. When you begin to say the Jesus Prayer, don't you have a desire for it?

– I feel the need for help, because I feel weak.

– Well, that's where one starts from. In prayer, we mus be persistent. The Evangelist says, *But they constrained him*, about the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus.[7] Christ remained with them, because they had a relationship with Him, and they were entitled. They had humility, simplicity, goodness and even boldness, in the good sense, all the prerequisites, and for this reason Christ stayed with them.

We must pray with faith for every matter and we must have patience, and God will speak. Because when man prays with faith, God is in a sense obligated by virtue of our faith to fulfil our request. For this reason, when we ask for something from God, let us never be in doubt and we shall be heard. The Lord said, *Have faith and doubt not*.[8] God knows when to give us what we ask for, so we won't be harmed spiritually. Sometimes we ask God

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[6] Lk 24:29.
[7] Cf. Lk 24:13-32.
[8] Cf. Mt 21:21.

for something, but we have no patience and are troubled. But, since we have an Almighty God Who has so much love that He nurtures us with His Body and Blood, we have no business being troubled. Sometimes we don't leave a matter in God's hands but instead try to deal with it in a human way. When we ask God for something but have doubts and act by human means to achieve what is really difficult, without waiting for God's answer to our request, it is like making a petition to God, our King, and then withdrawing it just as He stretches out His hand to act on our behalf. We beseech Him again, but again we doubt and are troubled and repeat the same thing. Thus, we are tormented continuously. We behave like the person who petitions the Ministry, and, after a while, changes his mind and withdraws his petition. He changes his mind again and resubmits it; after a while, he again withdraws it. The petition, however, has to stand in order to wait its turn.

### *Prayer With Pain*

– Geronda, how do you pray about a certain matter?

– The main thing is to feel compassion. If one is not compassionate, he may sit for hours with the *komboschoini*, and his prayer will have no result whatsoever. If there is pain in his heart about what he is praying for, even with a single sigh he will have prayed from the heart. Many, who when asked to pray have no time, will sigh for the other's problem and that in itself is a prayer. I'm not saying prayer needn't be done, but, if there is no time, a sigh for the pain of another is a prayer from the heart; it equals hours of prayer. You read, for example, a letter, you realize there is a problem, you sigh over it and then you pray. This is very important. Before you even pick up the telephone receiver, even before you call, God hears you! And how the other person learns of this! You should see how those possessed by demons realize when I am praying for them, and cry out wherever they may be.

Real prayer begins from pain; it is not a pleasant experience, a "nirvana". What kind of pain is it? One is troubled in the good sense of the term. He feels pain, he groans, he suffers when praying for anything whatsoever. Do you know what it means to suffer? Yes, he suffers, because he is participating in everyone's pain or in the pain of one particular person. This participation, this pain, is rewarded by God with divine exultation. Of course, he doesn't ask for this exultation, but it comes as a consequence, because he participates in the pain of others.

– How will he begin?

– Let's say he learns of an accident and sighs, and, at that moment, God gives him divine consolation for his compassionate sigh. He sees someone who is hurting, and immediately feels compassion, and is thus consoled by God with divine consolation; he doesn't remain with that initial bitterness over the accident. The other person is helped through his prayer. Or he may think to himself, "God has given us so many blessings; what have I done for God?" I was impressed by what one soul said to me, "The Angels cover their faces when the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist is being celebrated, while we commune with the Body and Blood of Christ. What have I done for Christ?" He suffers in a good sense.

– Geronda, how does one understand that someone has been helped by his prayer?

– He realizes it from the divine consolation which he feels inside after praying from the heart in pain. But first, you must make the other person's pain your own and then pray from the heart. Love is a divine attribute and informs the other person. Even in hospitals, when the doctors and nurses feel genuine compassion for their patients, this is the most effective medicine of all the medications given to them. The patients feel they are being cared for with love and have a sense of certainty, security, and consolation. You don't need to say much to someone who is suffering or try to instruct him. He understands that you feel his pain and care about him, and he is helped by this. Feeling his pain is everything. If we feel compassion for others, we forget ourselves and our problems.

### *Divine Consolation*

– Geronda, when I feel pain for others, I become anxious and cannot pray.

– This anxiety shows that there is a human element in you. The more I am pained by people's sufferings, the more I pray and rejoice spiritually at telling Christ everything and having Him take care of it. And I notice that as time passes and physical courage diminishes, spiritual courage increases because love, sacrifice, and compassion for others provide great spiritual strength. And I must admit that this evening during your vigil,[9] I wasn't really up to it, but I received renewed strength from the pain of others. And I was able to stand through the night until the Divine Liturgy by seeing all the people. Even later, standing in the Church, I didn't feel tired because I felt compassion for those people and this strengthened me. You, too, must pray and rejoice, because Christ will take care of everything.

There is no grief in the spiritual encounter. With those people now I went through so much pain! I didn't pass over their problems lightly. I was pained by them, I sighed over them, but with every sigh I turned the matter over to God and in the pain I felt for the other person God provided consolation. That is to say, divine consolation came with the spiritual approach, because the pain which carries with it hope in God also has divine consolation. Otherwise how is one to endure! How could I possibly get through all the things that I hear? Yes, I feel the pain, but I also think of the divine reward in those who are suffering. We are in God's hands. Since there is divine justice, divine reward, nothing is lost. The more one is tormented, the more he will be rewarded. Although God sees so much suffering upon the earth, even things which we cannot imagine, He never falters. "You have suffered more?" He asks, "I will provide you with more in the other life", and He rejoices. Otherwise, how could He endure so much injustice, so much evil that exists? But He keeps in mind the reward of those who suffer and, in a manner of speaking, endures that great pain. We don't see the glory to be received by the other person and so we feel compassion for him, and for this God rewards us with divine consolation.

– Geronda, won't this worry exhaust us?

– No. Someone who faces every problem spiritually is not exhausted. At first, he is grieved, embittered, when he hears that someone is suffering, but then divine consolation comes as a reward and the human organism is not destroyed. While bitterness from worldly worry brings gastro-intestinal illnesses, and so on, spiritual compassion does not harm our organism because it has the divine balsam.

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[9] The Elder is referring to the vigil of the 9th to the 10th of November 1993. In spite of his great suffering from cancer, he stood, holding on to a chair, and gave his blessing to approximately thirty thousand people who passed by that day.

### *The Danger of Insensitivity*

– Geronda, sometimes, lay people ask me to pray for some problem they have. I do it, but without feeling any pain for them.

– Here there are two cases: the first is dangerous, the second has a spiritual resolution. When the monk forgets his family and doesn't think of others either, that is, doesn't pray for the world, this is very bad. We come to the monastery, we abandon our family, and we end up forgetting not only our family but even more so the others. We see things spiritually, but we don't share in others' pain spiritually. We don't make spiritual progress, to be able to feel their problems, and there is a danger of becoming insensitive. Indifference creeps in and the heart becomes like stone. In the second case one feels pain for everyone, but also finds consolation in knowing that the sufferer will have a reward from God for being a martyr. With this thought, one feels a deep certainty and has an inner joy. In this case the heart isn't stony, but divine.

If monks and nuns aren't careful, their hearts can become very hard. Lay people see accidents, the suffering of others, and are pained. We don't see this suffering and may pray only for ourselves. That is, if we don't work

nuns don't pray, then who will? The soldier in wartime is on alert, always ready with his shoes on. The monk must also be on alert. How I would have loved to be a Maccabee,[10] to withdraw to the mountains and pray constantly for the world.

We must help everyone with our prayer and not let the devil have his way with them. The devil has acquired rights. Not because God has given him permission, but because He doesn't want to violate man's free will. This is why we can help through prayer. When one is pained over the prevailing condition of the world and prays, then people can be helped, without violating free will. If you continue with the Grace of God a little further, we can begin to make some progress on the issue of prayer, to put into effect a certain order, to be a radar station of prayer, for the urgency of the times requires it. We must organize a prayer taskforce. You must wage war with the *komboschoini*. Pray with pain in your heart for the world. Do you know what great power such prayer has?

I am deeply hurt to see monks who act in human ways and not with prayer through God in matters which are difficult to achieve by human means. God can put everything in order. When one does good spiritual work, then, through prayer alone, one can build monasteries, equip them with all the necessary things and help the whole world. There is no need to even work, as long as one prays. A monk must try not to worry over every little difficulty, whether it is personal or affects a fellow human being, or even the general state of society, but should instead resort to prayer and send, through God, many divine powers. After all, a monk's work is precisely the work of prayer, and if any monk has not realized this, his life is without meaning. For this reason, he must know that every worry which urges him to seek human solutions to various problems, with suffering and headaches, is a result of demonic temptation. When you see yourselves worrying about matters which have no human solution, and you don't put them in God's hands, you must understand that this is a machination of the devil, to distract you from prayer, with which God can send not only divine power but many divine powers, and this divine help will then be not simply divine help but a miracle from God. From the moment we begin to be troubled and anxious, we prevent God from intervening. We tend to put our reasoning first rather than God, the divine will, so that we may deserve divine help. The devil tries, by craftily misdirecting a monk's love, to limit him to a worldly love, to a human way of helping his fellow human beings, whereas the monk can move in his own space, in his own field, which is to be a wireless operator of prayer, the unique service God has given him to do. All the other things a monk may do through his human efforts are of secondary importance.

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[10] The name Maccabees was given to Judah, leader of the Jewish rebellion of 166 BC against Antiochos IV Epiphanes, ruler of the kingdom of Seleucids. The title, according to the more probable opinion, refers to the one who hammered the enemy. The same name was given also to the successors of Judah. The Maccabees distinguished themselves in the struggles for the traditional faith and for political freedom of the Jewish people. (See 1, 2 and 3 Maccabees.)

Also it is better for the monk to help others with his prayer than with his words. If he does not have the power to keep someone from doing evil, then he should help him from afar through prayer, otherwise he may himself be harmed. A prayer from the heart has more power than

a thousand words, especially for someone who won't listen. Even though people say that I help those who come here to see me, I consider my true help to people to be my reading of the Psalms for an hour and a half each day. I view all else as entertainment; people come and tell me their problems and I give them some advice, some spiritual counsel. As such, any help they may receive is not from me, for it is the prayer that really helps. If I could devote all my time to prayer, I think I would be helping people more. Let's say I see two hundred suffering people a day; are there only two hundred people suffering in the world? If I see no one and spend all day praying for the whole world, then I see everyone. This is why I tell people, "I prefer to talk to God about you, rather than to talk to you about God. This is better for you, but you don't understand me."

In these difficult years let us not neglect the work of prayer. Prayer is security; it is communication with God. Did you see what Abba Isaac says? God will not ask us why we did not pray, but why we did not have a relationship with Christ and allowed the devil to torment us.[11]

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[11] See Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 32, p. 151. *On that day, God will not judge us about psalmody, nor for the neglect of prayer, but because by abandoning them, we have opened our door to the demons.*

# CHAPTER TWO

Τα μοναστήρια Είναι τα οχυρά της Εκκλησίας

## Monasteries Are the Fortresses of the Church[1]

### *The Monk Is a Beacon of Light Upon the Rocks*

Geronda, what is the work of a monk?

– The work of a monk is to become a vessel of the Holy Spirit. A monk must make his heart as sensitive as the gold leaf used by iconographers. The entire work of the monk is love, just as he became a monk out of love for God, which includes love for one's neighbour. The monk meditates upon the sufferings of society, his heart is pained and he prays from the heart constantly for all the people. Thus he helps the world through his prayer. There are monks who help the people more than the whole world together could help them. For example, a worldly person may give a couple of oranges or a kilo of rice to some poor person, often just to be seen by others, while all along criticising others for not helping. But a monk can silently offer tons of help through his prayer.

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[1] Special volumes will appear on Monasticism and Prayer in the future. Included in this volume about these two themes is only what is related to the subject of spiritual awakening.

A monk doesn't make his own, worldly plans for missionary work, but proceeds without any plan of his own, and the Benevolent God takes him into His own divine plan and, in His divine way, He will send him to do missionary work if needed. God doesn't ask monks to go out into the world to hold people's hands and help them walk; He asks them by their life to provide a light to guide people to eternal life. In other words, the monk's mission is not to help people by being in the world. A monk flees far from the world, not because he hates people but because he loves them, and only by living far from the world will he be able to help them with his prayer in whatever cannot be done by human means but only through divine intervention. This is why a monk must be in constant communion with God, to receive messages and to show people the way to God.

I couldn't understand how the Roman Catholics justify certain things. My query was answered a few years ago when two Roman Catholic architects from Rome came by my *Kalyvi*. They were ignorant, but meant well. They asked me, "What are the monks doing by staying here? Why don't they go out into the world to do social work?" I said, "Aren't beacons always set upon rocky heights? Why should they go to the cities and be added to the streetlights? Lighthouses have one mission and street- lights have another." The monk is not a small streetlight to be put in the city at the side of the street to light pedestrians so they don't stumble. A monk is an isolated beacon, positioned high on the crags of a rocky shore, to provide light and direction for those upon the seas and the oceans, so that they may guide their ships to reach their destination, to reach God.

### *The Quiet Preaching of the Monk*

I will pray that you three novices don't grow up, but remain as you are now with those blue headscarves, at that height and that age. Do you realize how people are quietly helped when they see you? For in the world today people can't easily find a proper young girl. Most are wild, with a cigarette in their hand, making unpleasant grimaces. And when people see here young girls dedicated, chanting, joyful, they ask themselves, "What's happening here? Something's going on. We can't say they're stupid, because they aren't. We can't say they're missing something, because they aren't. It's clear there's something higher here." Indeed, do you know how much this helps?

When worldly people visit a monastery and see proper monks, then even if they are unbelievers, if they are well-disposed, they can become believers. Many atheist scientists, who came to the Holy Mountain just for a visit, have changed their way of life. They are troubled, in the good sense, by what they see and hear, and are helped. They see young men, who are joyful, who had every opportunity to succeed in the world, but who have abandoned wealth, position, and so forth, to live ascetically, with prayer and vigils, and they ask themselves, "What is going on here? If indeed God exists, if there is another life, if there is a hell, what am I doing with my life?" So they rein in their sinful way of life, or correct it altogether. I know of one case. A young woman of twenty attempted suicide by cutting her veins, but was saved in time. After that, a monk took her to a monastery. The poor thing was wild. But when she saw the nuns there, she quickly recovered. "I see another world here," she said, and asked, "May I stay here?"

This is the silent preaching of the monks. Many preach, but few inspire confidence in what they say, because they don't practice what they preach. A monk doesn't deliver sermons out loud to be heard by others, but preaches Christ silently with his life and helps with his prayer. He lives the Gospel, and the Grace of God gives him away. Thus the Gospel is preached in the most effective way, something which people thirst to see and hear, especially today. And when the monk speaks, he doesn't simply offer a thought; he speaks from his experience. But even if he does express a thought, even this is enlightened.

– Geronda, some people say that young men and women enter a monastery because they are disillusioned or have some disability, or even because they are weak in the head.

– It seems that these people have one or two such cases in mind and then go on unfairly, out of spite or envy, to malign ninety per cent of the monks. But if they look closely, they see that this is not the case, and they will admit that there is indeed something higher here, that God does indeed exist.

This is why a monk must always set a good example for other people, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*[2] A true monk is the light of the world. What does Saint John Climacus say? *The Angels serve as light to the monks, and the monks serve as*

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[2] Mt 5:16.

*light to the people of the world.*[3] When the monk can be distinguished from the people of the world, then he can have a positive effect upon them. What helps the people in the world, who are suffering over vain things, is holiness, which, through its simplicity, teaches them to grasp the deeper meaning of life and dispel the heaviness in their heart.

### *The Monk and the Renewal of the World*

Monks are Christ's regular army, and that's why they're not paid. You see how many people who come to visit the Holy Mountain can never forget it. Wherever else they go, people will ask them for money, and so on, while on the Holy Mountain all they have to do is present their visitor's permit and after that they can go anywhere they wish without paying anything. They will eat free, they will sleep free. They find something different and are helped spiritually. When I was at the *Kalyvi* of the Precious Cross,[4] someone came who had many problems. We spoke for an hour and a half. Then he took out a five hundred drachma note. "What's that?" I asked him. "For a simple visit to the doctor we pay at least this much," he told me. "Please forgive me, is it perhaps not enough?"

Some European Community officials, who came to the Holy Mountain after the last fire to assess the situation and see how they could help, came by the *Kalyvi*. In our conversation I told them, "We came here to give,

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[3] See John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 26:23, p. 128.

[4] The Elder lived at the *Kalyvi* of the Precious Cross during the years 1969-1978.

not to receive." "This is the first time we have heard this," they told me and made a note of it immediately.[5] We didn't become monks to receive material goods; we became monks to be able to give spiritual things, without any material benefit. To be free of worldly cares so we can devote all of our time to our spiritual responsibilities. We left the world and went into the ascetic life for the love of Christ, to liberate ourselves from the passions and to liberate others as well.

Our goal is to help people with our prayer and through our example, so that they may experience a spiritual rebirth. When someone leaves the world and enters the monastery, he or she becomes a spiritual Father or a spiritual Mother. When a young woman becomes a nun, she is "married"; she becomes a bride of Christ, a spiritual Mother, and helps people to be spiritually reborn. For example, with her prayer she helps in the creation of good Christian families. But besides prayer, in certain circumstances she must also offer assistance to people on the human level. Every good nun, besides the prayer she offers for people, provides great help with her manner, with the right approach, with a few words of spiritual guidance she speaks to a pilgrim, to help him grasp the deeper meaning of life, or to a mother to encourage her. But for a nun to want to communicate with the world is useless, because such social contacts conflict with the spiritual laws and as a result we suffer. As much as you can, seek to be active in obscurity. I make a comparison and it pains me: Some monks enjoy going to festivals, visits and having spiritual friendships. When I'm forced to go somewhere for spiritual work, I feel as if I am going to be tormented, and I see it as a waste of time.

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[5] These words were spoken in May 1991.

– Geronda, when a nun is mature in years but immature spiritually, what is at fault?

– She doesn't examine herself carefully and doesn't do the necessary spiritual work. The problem begins from there. Let us assume that Christ didn't call someone to become a nun, and she stayed in the world and became a mother. Then she wouldn't have demands of others, but others would have demands of her. She would have given much and would have received much with the sacrifice she would have made. In the monastery, she must become a spiritual Mother; her mission is higher than a mother's. But now what happens? She enters the monastery at a young age and, if she doesn't make proper spiritual progress, continues to think of herself as a child. But she must realize that she isn't a child who thinks, "We have our mother, we have our home, we are carefree, and I don't have a care in the world." She must give of herself and assist in the younger Sisters' spiritual rebirth through her behaviour, or help the pilgrims who come to the monastery, and sacrifice herself in everything, and she shall receive without asking. If a nun doesn't offer herself in this manner, everything is lost. She remains in an undeveloped state and wants constantly to take from both the young and the old, without giving of herself. She cultivates a sickly spirit and doesn't mature, because she doesn't offer herself to others.

I see in some monks precisely the condition of a Bedouin whom I had known at Mount Sinai. He was sixty-five years old and said, "I, too, have no father; I am an orphan." At sixty-five, people have grandchildren. Two and three generations have passed and he still says, "I, too, have no father," and is still seeking a father's love. We monks, if we are not careful, can remain children, and this is bad. But if the nun or monk thinks what she or he would be doing in the world at her age, she could say, "Now I shouldn't be looking for human consolation; I must sacrifice myself and not make demands on others." Most of them come to the monastery at a young age, find spiritual parents, and may remain in a childish condition, with childish requests, whereas if they had stayed in the world, they would have become parents. In other words, they remain forever children, not in the good sense but in the immature sense. They will grow old, but unless they exercise their mind, they may, for example, get excited over a piece of candy or a piece of clothing. There was an elderly monk on the Holy Mountain who used to say, "My Spiritual Father got me a woollen sweater," and would show the sweater given to him by his Elder. He was as excited as a small child whose mother has bought him a braided jacket!

We must be children in our innocence, but not in our way of thinking.[6] For otherwise, how will bravery enter into our life? How are we to acquire a manly and mature spirit? A monk, in order to progress spiritually, must soften his hard heart, and try to make it like a mother's heart. Even a nun, in order to make spiritual progress, must acquire a little manliness.

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[6] Cf. 1 Cor 14:20.

### *Spiritual Modesty Transforms Others*

– Geronda, how can someone who enters a monastery discard the worldly state of mind, the worldly air that he still has?

– When he enters the monastery, he must forget the world, and then must not forget that he is in a monastery. At home perhaps he wasn't helped, wasn't brought up properly; but now it is important what kind of spiritual education he receives here in the monastery. Of course, it will be a monastic education. The monastery is a sacred place. The outside world is something else. When someone is aware of being in a sacred place, modesty and restraint come by themselves. But if one forgets and imagines oneself in the world, while in the monastery, how then can modesty be cultivated? A nun must move about in a natural manner, with simplicity, with humility, and not try to look wretched. Such behaviour is repulsive and disgusting.

In some novice Sisters who walk with an air of confident pride, I see something worldly. They walk like brides in the world, not brides of Christ. Whereas, I observe something sacred in those who walk with a modest gait. What a difference between the one and the other! One can immediately understand what Monasticism is. If you observe the wheat stalks, you will notice that the ones which are standing tall and upright have nothing inside. Whereas the wheat stalks which are mature and ripe are bending downward.

A devout monk can transform others who look upon him. Just today a priest monk came whom I have known for many years. Even though he is not particularly handsome, that is, he does not have an external beauty, every time he received Holy Communion, I saw him glow. But even when he was not receiving Holy Communion, I detected a light, a spiritual gleam in his face. Just as the asphalt on the roads can be seen with a gleaming shine from a distance in the summer, even though it is tar, so in this case one can see brightness in someone who is not handsome. (This, of course, is not a very good example, but what can one put forward as an example?) The spiritual condition of his inner being endows him with an external glow. This is spiritual beauty, grace, divine Grace. In contrast, other clerics who are externally handsome, but who have a worldly spirit and move about with an air of worldly pride, are so repulsive! You see someone who is entirely secular. Apart from his ordination as a clergyman, there is nothing else spiritual to see. A person's face mirrors his soul. This is what Christ said, *The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.*[7] If someone has simplicity, humility, there is divine enlightenment, and he shines. Now, this is what a monk must achieve.

– Geronda, Saint Neilos the Kalavros says that from the moment someone is tonsured to be a monk, he will become either an angel or a devil.[8] Does this mean that there is nothing in between?

– What he means is that a monastic person must seek to do the very best possible work in his calling. This is why when a monk of the Great Habit falls into mortal sin, God allows a rod to fall upon him for the purpose of expiation. Sometimes we imagine that Grace can be obtained by external means, in an artificial or magical manner. But this way neither God nor the person himself is at ease, and others are also not put at ease by such superficial spirituality. Some monks, for example, make broad and long Great Habits reaching down to their feet, with red crosses, roses, red branches and many letters... And they open their cassock to reveal the Habit, like the Pharisees who *make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments*,[9] to show that they pray a lot! But in the past one could barely see the Habit under the cassock of a monk as he walked. In fact, many wore a small Habit underneath to hide it altogether. Now we have vain and empty things. Is this how they will receive Grace from the Habit? The Habit abhors them and Grace departs. The goal is to become a monk of the Great Habit from within. And anyone who is a monk of the Great Habit from within will hide his external Habit. An external object does not bring about the inner transformation. Thus, man remains on the external plane, and in the end Christ will tell us, *I know you not.*[10]

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[7] Mt 6:22.

[8] See *Saint Neilos the Kalavros*, ed. Holy Metochion of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, Ormylia 1991, p. 252.

### *The Monasteries' Goal Is a Spiritual One*

A monk is interested in his own salvation and in the salvation of all the living and departed. For a monk the real, divine love is to be found in the pain endured for the salvation of his soul, and in the pain endured for the

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[9] Mt 23:5.
[10] Mt 25:12.

salvation of all the people in the world. The dedicated soul of a monk contributes to the salvation not only of his family members, but also of his compatriots. This is why there was a good tradition in Asia Minor to have at least one monk from every group of kinsmen in order to have him intercede for all the others. In Pharasa, when someone became a monk, the entire town would celebrate and say, "He will be of great help to our town as well."

A monk, of course, would never say "I want to save the world," but he will surely pray for the salvation of all the people in the world together with his own salvation. And when the Benevolent God hears his prayer and indeed helps the people, the monk again would not say "I saved the people," but rather "God saved the people." The monk must attain the spiritual state where he will be able to say, "My God, do not look at me, do not have mercy on me, but look and have mercy on the people of the world." And he can say this not because he has no need of God's mercy, but because he has so much love for other people.

– Geronda, to what extent should a monk abandon himself in order to help the people?

– To the extent that he can see people benefiting. If I abandon myself entirely into the hands of worldly people, I, too, will become worldly. When a monk does things presumably to help worldly people, which, however, are not appropriate in Monasticism, then the worldly people will not benefit. A monk can, for example, be an excellent taxi driver, not charging his customers and teaching them spiritual things, but this is not monasticism. Sometimes one can find monks who have a worldly spirit, and laypersons who have a monastic spirit. This is why in the other life Christ will say to some, "You take off that Monastic Habit, and you put it on..." The layperson who desires the life of the monk is sanctified, while the monk who desires the worldly life will be tormented.

– Can someone understand if he is not properly positioned in his calling?

– Even if he doesn't understand, if there is something wrong, he will not have complete peace and serenity in his soul. His soul will not find peace in whatever is not appropriate to Monasticism. And from the moment his soul does not find peace, he must seek to find out what is wrong.

Someone I knew went to a monastery and then came to tell me, "There is light manufacturing going on there; and the abbess is good for Monasteraki[11] in Athens, where she will be a great salesperson of buttons!" In other words, the monastery had become a shop of light manufacturing; after that, it becomes a manufacturing unit, then a supermarket and then a hypermarket! The poor lay people expect something higher from us monks and, to reach this higher spiritual state, we must avoid every human consolation.

The goal of the monasteries is a spiritual one and no worldly element should exist there, only a heavenly one where the souls can be inundated with heavenly delights. In worldly matters we cannot compete with the people of the world, for they have more abundant means. Do you know how a monastery living a thoroughly spiritual life can positively affect people in the world? When there is devotion, fear of God, and neither worldly rationalism

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[11] A neighbourhood in Athens known for its commercialism.

nor a commercial spirit, this is what moves and inspires lay people. But unfortunately the commercial spirit is gradually entering into the very marrow of Monasticism.

A monk had come to my *Kalyvi* while I was weaving a *komboschoini*. "You give away the prayer *komboschoinia* as a blessing to your visitors, but I can sell that *komboschoini* of thirty-three knots that you're making for five hundred drachmas. And I don't make it like you do. As soon as I finish the knots, I cut it and sew it a little so I don't lose the threads. I even use the threads which I cut from the cross, I connect them without using any beads, and this way I make more profit." "You should be ashamed of yourself," I told him. "Don't you realize that you are possessed by a commercial spirit? I've been a monk since 1950 and this is the first time I've seen such an attitude!"

– Geronda, few people are so truly mature spiritually that they can help others!

– Yes, sadly there are so few! No wonder people go astray! Do you know how much I pray for God to present to the world true and authentic Christians who will be able to help people? It's enough for the people if you feel for them a little and don't exploit them; they don't ask for anything more than that. In the world, they are constantly at war and feel insecure. When they go to a properly functioning monastery, they benefit, for they feel secure and this gives them consolation and encouragement to continue their struggle.

In these difficult times people don't lack material food so much as they do spiritual food. People don't lack bread – even though this, too, is needed in many parts of the world and will soon be more difficult to obtain –, they need spiritual help. We must concentrate on helping the whole world with our prayer. Let us, for example, help prevent a family from breaking up, or help a mother to raise her poor children properly. Let us try to support the devoted ones.

### *A Spiritual State Is a Spiritual Fortress*

Today is the time for souls to be prepared, for if something were to happen, I don't know what lies ahead. May God prevent difficult days from coming, but if they do come, with a slight earthquake, a shake-up, whole brotherhoods, entire monasteries, will come crashing down, because each one will try to save himself and go his own way.

Much attention is needed for God not to abandon us. Your souls must have something spiritual in them. This is what makes you honourable. There will come a great shaking. I have told you so much, I have spoken so sternly! If I had been so forewarned I would be troubled over it, I would ask why I was told such things and what must be done. For one thing, I wouldn't sleep over this for at least one night, if not for many nights. If I didn't see the difficult years ahead, I wouldn't be so troubled. But what I see is that later you will be greatly troubled. You may not understand me now, but you will understand me later.

– Geronda, what is someone to do if he is alone during difficult years?

– Start now by first of all being obedient, acquiring discernment, and then we'll see. This is why we must first get rid of our faults. If one has faults, he will not be able to get through the difficult times. If now he complains about

everything and considers himself to be a heroic person, while all the others are in a terrible spiritual state, imagine then... Make sure you correct yourselves now so you will be entitled to divine help. Put your trust more into God and find your support in Him. We will have more difficult years. The fruits ... are still unripe; they haven't ripened yet. When you become spiritually mature, do you know what you will be? A fortress. Not only for here, but you will be helpful to others further away. Otherwise, you too will need human help and protection. And have you any idea how bad it is for a monastery, with so many Sisters, to be in need of laypersons?

Today, as always, a monk must live spiritually in order to be able to overcome a difficulty. He must be prepared, and not worry over deprivations, because then he may end up betraying Christ. A time will come when all the rivers will dry up, everyone will be thirsty, everyone will suffer. For us monks this is not so terrible a thing; for if we are thirsty, we should be thirsty, having voluntarily accepted to endure hardships. And I will say, "Whatever I didn't do voluntarily as a monk, I now do involuntarily in order to understand what it means to be a monk. Thanks be to God!" But what about the poor people! When people reach the point of inventing bombs which kill people and spare the buildings, what can I say? Christ said, *One soul is worth as much as the whole world,*[12] and yet they value buildings more than all the people; this is horrible!

– Geronda, I am afraid of what awaits us.

– Such fear helps us to hold on to Christ. Not, of course, that one should rejoice over what awaits us, but at least one can rejoice at the chance to struggle for Christ. In other words, we may not go through an occupation like that of Hitler or Mussolini, but we will be tested for Christ. We won't win by having machine guns or atomic bombs; this will be a spiritual war. We will do battle with the devil himself. But the devil has no authority over us that we ourselves don't hand over to him. What then should we fear? It would be different if indeed the enemy were a Hitler or a Mussolini. But now let no fear be in you. In fact, rejoice that the battle is a spiritual one.

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[12] Cf. Mt 16:26.

If you live monastically, patristically, and are spiritually vigilant, you will be entitled to divine intervention in every attack of the enemy. If there are people of prayer, humble people, who have pain and love in their heart, they will serve as spiritual "capital" and be spiritual "bases". When two or three souls exist in a monastery who think of the pain of others and who pray, this is a spiritual fortress that can keep all enemies at bay.

### *Prayer, Proper Living, Example*

– Geronda, what is the proper position for a monk to take in today's difficult circumstances?

– First of all there must be prayer, proper living, setting a good example, and whenever and wherever needed, speaking out.

– Do you mean that a monk must speak out when the situation requires it?

– But of course, if a monk doesn't speak out, who will? A monk has nothing to fear. The others are afraid of

being removed from their positions. Those of us who are dedicated to God must lead the way, otherwise who will?

My thought tells me that God will not allow it; He will not allow it! This present situation will be cleared up. For now it seems there is a large net which contains fish but which is rotten. It goes this way and that way but in the end it will break. And it won't break because the fish are large, but because the net is rotten.

– Geronda, are the fish the Christians?

– Yes, and the others are the eels, the snakes. But we, too, will be accountable to God for this situation. I am now speaking openly; I cannot contain myself any more.

– Geronda, what then are we supposed to do?

– First of all, we must work on ourselves. For as a monk my goal is to dissolve my own human spirit, to correct myself first, to become a truly spiritual person, for otherwise my life as a monk has no meaning. Then we must speak out when needed, and God will help to bring about positive results.

– Geronda, some people say it is better to keep silent and pray.

– You can't be indifferent when everything is burning around you. You must put out the fire. The pain won't let you keep silent. Of course, the most important thing is to try to live a spiritual life as far as possible. And, if it becomes necessary to take a certain position on an important issue, a monk will take the position which God permits.

Live humbly, simply and spiritually, so that at a difficult moment you will not be obliged to make compromises. Next make sure that young women will come to become nuns who have the necessary prerequisites for Monasticism, so they can become true and authentic nuns.

When someone becomes a true monk, then he knows how far he should concern himself with a particular issue. He will know what to do and what not to do, and how he should act. If he doesn't become a true monk, then everything goes wrong. Do you understand this? If you become true nuns, you will act with prudence. But if you don't become true nuns, and you send one of your number out into the world, you must instruct her in detail to say this up to this point, say that up to that point, for otherwise she may say foolish things. This, of course, is a condition of one who is underdeveloped. How then can one get through difficult situations?

For this reason those who have the necessary prerequisites for Monasticism should be cultivated and developed to become true nuns, so they know how far to go and what to say or not say; so they know what to do in a difficult situation. And they will function within the boundaries of obedience, for their spirit will agree with the spirit of the Abbess. At a critical moment, the Abbess will make one simple gesture, and the nuns will understand, because they are working on the same wavelength. Otherwise, you cannot have a spiritual community. If you don't learn to work this way, someone else may break into the same frequency, saying different things and doing great harm, without you realizing it.

### *Monasticism Is in Danger*

The world today is burning and Monasticism is weakening, unravelling, losing its value. If the spirituality of Monasticism goes, nothing remains. On the Holy Mountain, a pilgrim said to a monk, "Is there no spirit of asceticism here?" The monk replied, "This is now a new period in our history; those things are gone!" You may say that this was just one fool. There may be another five or ten such fools; but if they say such silly things, they should be locked up in the Monastery tower! They have no right to say such things, denigrating Monasticism in our time and scandalizing people. Some people are just looking for such an occasion for scandal.

In time, you will see some monasteries gradually doing away with the patristic readings so that they will not be censured by them. They will introduce other readings of a social nature because supposedly they are helpful in our times. That is where we're going! And the poor laypersons come to the monasteries to be helped... Just as the devout person in society is now scorned, soon the true monk will be scorned in the monasteries. If we are not vigilant to prevent the influence of the secular spirit from taking over, God forbid, before long, a young man will come to the monastery, wishing to live a true monastic life, and the others will say, "What business have you here with us?" When people see monks who are no different from lay people in the world, they become disillusioned with Monasticism in general. Many come and tell me how they are scandalized by certain monasteries. How am I now to correct such thoughts?

Much of the secular spirit has entered into Monasticism, and there is no end to it. Monks must be monks, not worldly people. We have lost the simplicity which the older generations had. Now the young monks are guided by human reasoning and a worldly politeness; they are too careful not to lose their good name and so forth. A few years ago one could still see in the *Coenobitic* Monasteries the true Lausaikon[13] tradition of Monasticism. Some entered monasteries out of a divine zeal and others out of repentance. There were many different circumstances. Someone whose wife had died would leave the world and enter a monastery. Another who had lived a worldly life for years would repent and enter a monastery. You could find even possessed people in the monastery, who took refuge there and were healed by the prayers of the Fathers, and then stayed on to become monks. If afterward they fell into some disorder, they became possessed again, and so there were some who were possessed in the monasteries. You could also find some who were in error, others who were fools for Christ, and monks who had the gift of foresight and others with the gift of healing. There was a great variety! Today you find neither the gift of foresight, nor the gift of healing, not even any fools for Christ or any possessed. We now have the other foolishness, the foolishness of the world. We have become cerebral and this makes us fools. Much worldly reasoning has entered into our life and this abundance of reasoning is destroying everything. And to make things worse, we don't even realize it's a problem.

Today some monasteries are filled with all sorts of modern conveniences which make the monks' life 'inconvenient'. They fuss unnecessarily over details, but can't find time for the spiritual things that should be their first concern. If young people entering the monasteries merely exchange worldly anxiety for officiousness

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[13] The Lausiac History contains the biographies of ascetic Saints of Egypt and Palestine. The work was written approximately the middle of the 5th century by Bishop Palladios of Helenopolis in Bithynia and was dedicated to the Byzantine Patrician Lausos, from whom it takes its name.

in the monastery, they won't find peace. Soon they will want to become spiritual tourists, to take trips, to have a break. "I want to take my holiday," they will tell you, whereas a monk should tear himself away from his monastic cell with difficulty.

I am exasperated by a lot of things, and this is why I'm speaking out. I am pained by the present situation, because in the past the poor monks didn't even have spiritual books and were ignorant of Monasticism, and yet were able to progress. Thirty percent of them were born to be monks; the others who entered the monasteries were uncultivated and, as the saying goes, *They were walnuts from five hundred different walnut trees*, and yet were able to progress. Someone would go to the monastery, knowing nothing about spiritual things. He could stay there for two or three months and not even the Abbot would know who he was. After that when he said that he wanted to become a monk, he went to the Spiritual Father, made his confession and stayed in the monastery. And no one knew what kind of person he was, where he had come from and so forth. And the newcomer, despite all the problems and shortcomings he may have had, progressed in the spiritual life. And some of them were not even literate. They listened to the readings in the Refectory and the Lives of the Saints in Church and nothing else. And sometimes they didn't even understand the readings in the Refectory. Neither did they understand much of the chanting; they merely said a few prayers during the Church services, but they had good thoughts. And yet they reached spiritual heights, whereas now with Sunday Schools, with spiritual books, with so many advantages, everything goes to waste! In other words, the uncultivated people have cultivated a remarkable spiritual life, while the cultivated ones have nothing! In a way, it's like having a cultivated field that doesn't even produce enough to pay for the seed sown! Isn't this a serious problem? How do you see it?

In any case, if we aren't careful, Monasticism will not be able to stand; it will be blown away. Of course, the future belongs to Christ, and the matter is in the hands of our Loving Mother, *Panaghia*, who will take up the broom and again sweep out and tidy up Her monasteries. We must understand that everything will be lost and that we will stand in debt before God, if we do not live a true and authentic monastic life. We started out to become monks to work for the salvation of our souls and to help the people in the world through prayer. For this reason do not forget the promise you made to Christ, as you must not forget what people have to endure in the world, who were not favoured to be called into the Angelic Order of Monasticism.

### *Let Us Leave an Inheritance*

– Geronda, many people place their hopes on the monasteries. I feel the heavy burden of this responsibility.

– Yes, the only thing left now – as many say – is for some Saints, like Saint Cosmas the Aitolos, to go around the country preaching and enlightening the people. The monasteries are spiritual centres. If the monasteries were not there to help with the Greek Revolution of 1821, how could the Revolution have taken place? Again, during the German Occupation of World War II, it was the monasteries which held things together for the poor people. This is why they were destroyed later by the bands of Communist sympathizers during the guerrilla warfare. Most monasteries were not burned by the Germans; they were destroyed by these bands of Communist sympathizers. The Germans had threatened, "If we find weapons in the monasteries, we will burn them." To make themselves look good and to give the impression that it was the Germans who burned the monasteries, these bands conspired by leaving some old weapons in the monasteries and then reporting it to the Germans. When the Germans found these old weapons in the monasteries, they set the monasteries on fire. With this sinister technique, the Communist bands had many monasteries burned because they were afraid of them. This was their reasoning: "Even if the State becomes atheistic, we will not be able to achieve our goal if the monasteries remain, so let's burn them." And they burned them in this way.

Today people will go to the monasteries to find some spiritual yeast. But if the monasteries have become lukewarm and have no good spiritual yeast to give, what will people take? They won't find any yeast. We must therefore try to keep some yeast for the difficult years ahead. People who used to go to magicians and sorcerers now come to the monasteries for help. Later, people who are tired and weary of sin will come to us. And then even if we send them out to drink and to sin, they won't go.

During these difficult years, God is calling people with a personal invitation to join the ranks of Monasticism. This generation starts out for Monasticism on the best of terms, with ideals, but the devil renders useless all this potential. The next generation won't be like this.

Many will come to the monasteries who will not be suitable for the monastic life. They will be in such a state that they will be forced to become monks. They will be worn out and wounded by the world. Married couples will be divorced, with or without the blessing of the Church, and these spouses will go their separate ways to live in the monasteries. Young people who are weary of the worldly life will go to the monastery, some for the salvation of their soul, and others to find some peace and serenity. Others who really want to marry, but who are afraid to commit themselves to another person, will become monks. In other words, in the coming years people with mental illness and others who hesitate to start a family will perhaps come to the monasteries. They will be saying to themselves, "What will I find in married life? What will I do in the world? It's better to go and become a monk." That is to say, some people will take Monasticism to be a life of ease and idleness. Now, as to what kind of spiritual progress they may make, well, that's another matter. No one will come in a spirit of repentance. People will be in such a state that they'll be forced to become monks. Their motives won't be pure. This is the danger. It's different if someone sets out specifically to become a monk. These people will need a great deal of help, because, having tasted the pleasures of the world, the devil will oppose them more strenuously, while the rest of us will not be opposed so vigorously. With us the devil will try to prevent our spiritual work, to weaken our resolve with negligence or slothfulness, so that those who follow us will not find any spiritual yeast to ferment their own spiritual life.

What I'm trying to say with all this is that we must now make spiritual progress in order to be able to help these other people. We must leave them a patristic inheritance. We have spiritual joys, but we don't have heavenly joys. We have an ordination, a vigil, we chant the Psalm *Servants of the Lord*, and we even swing the chandeliers and experience joy. But these are not heavenly joys; they are physical joys of the heart, in the good sense of the term. Heavenly joy is something higher which cannot be expressed in words. When one begins to taste a little of these heavenly realities, the heart is profoundly stirred and seized by a divine madness. We must experience these joys of Heaven so we can transmit them to the coming generations.

# CHAPTER THREE

Το βαθύτερο νόημα της ζωής

## The Deeper Meaning of Life

### *We Must Prepare For the Other Life*

Geronda, a young man disappeared, after leaving a note to his parents that he was going to commit suicide, because he wasn't handsome, and that this was their fault.

– People haven't grasped the deeper meaning of life. They don't believe in the other life. This is where the whole torment of life begins. "I've been wronged," someone says, "others are happy, but I'm not happy." They aren't satisfied with what they have. Egoism enters into their life, and they are tormented. God loves everyone in the world. To each person He gave whatever is of benefit to him, stature, courage, beauty, intelligence and so on, whatever will be helpful, if utilized fully, for his salvation. And yet people are tormented. "Why am I like this, while he is like that?" But you have these qualities and he has other qualities. A Romanian fool for Christ who lived ascetically on the Holy Mountain said to someone who had such thoughts, "A bull frog saw a buffalo and said, 'I, too, want to be a buffalo.' The frog puffed and puffed

himself up so much that he finally burst. God made the one a frog and the other a buffalo. The frog tried to be a buffalo and burst!" We must rejoice in the way the Creator has made each one of us.

When a person is helped to believe in God and in the future, eternal life – that is, when he grasps the deeper meaning of life – and repents and changes his way of life, divine consolation comes immediately with the Grace of God, which transforms the person and dispels all his inherited shortcomings. Many people who repented and struggled with *philotimo* and humility, received Grace and became Saints, whom we now revere with devotion and ask for their intercessions, whereas before they had many passions and inherited weaknesses. Take Hosios Moses the Ethiopian, for example, who was a most bloodthirsty robber, with an inherited evil tendency. As soon as he believed in God and repented, he disciplined himself in the Christian way of life and all his passions disappeared, allowing the Grace of God to come to him and to make him worthy even of the gift of prophecy. He even exceeded in Christian sensitivity Saint Arsenios[1] the Great, who was from the noblest family of Rome, with inherited virtues and a great scientific education.

– Geronda, what precisely is the meaning of this life?

– What is it? It is to be prepared for our homeland, for Heaven, for Paradise. The most important thing is for

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[1] Saint Arsenios the Great (354-447) was born in Rome. He was great in wisdom and virtue. He was called "father of kings," because Emperor Theodosios had appointed him to educate his two sons. In 394, after a divine inspiration, he left Rome for the desert of Egypt. Even though he had lived in the imperial palace, he distinguished himself as a monk of great austerity and ascetical practices.

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man to grasp this most profound meaning of life, which is the salvation of the soul. When man believes in God and in the future life, then he understands the vanity of this present life and prepares his passport for the other life. We forget that all of us will leave this life. None of us are going to put roots down here. This present life is not for us to have a good time. On the contrary, it is meant for us to be tested and to pass over into the future, eternal life. Our goal here must be to prepare ourselves so we can depart with our conscience at ease when God calls us close to Him.

When Christ blessed the five loaves and satisfied the hunger of thousands of people, they immediately decided that He was the ideal person to become their king! They ate the five loaves and the two fish and were enthusiastic. But Christ told them not to be concerned about this earthly bread, for they are not destined to remain here on earth.[2] In this life, everyone is tested to see if he measures up to what God asks of him.

– Geronda, what must we always keep in mind in order to do God's will?

– We must keep our mind focused on God; think why we are here in this life. We didn't come here to do everything and be comfortable. We came to prepare ourselves for the other life. So our mind must constantly be there and on anything that will help us to get there. By facing this responsibility with *philotimo* and by undertaking a humble and *philotimo*-filled struggle we can understand the meaning of the spiritual life. The spiritual life is a brave undertaking, a spiritual feast. Do you have any idea what it means to have a feast, a *glendi*? It means grasping the deeper meaning of Monasticism, of spiritual nobility, of patristic sensitivity. Everyone has the responsibility of understanding the deeper meaning of life; not of Monasticism, but of life. If they did this, then people wouldn't be mean and petty, nor would they grumble with one another. Since there is divine retribution, let's be looking to earn some spiritual cash for there, and not how to maintain our dignity and enjoy human honour and esteem.

When man places himself in the realm of real life, he enjoys everything. He rejoices in living and he rejoices in dying.[3] Not because he is tired of living, but because he will die and go to Christ.

– Geronda, does one rejoice because he does not oppose what God permits?

– He rejoices because he can see that this life is temporary, while the other is eternal. He's not tired of life, but he thinks, "What are we doing, aren't we leaving?" and he prepares himself for there, because he understands that this is his destiny, the meaning of life.

Social workers are very kind, the poor things, and work very hard to help others in need. They study psychology to prepare themselves for their work, but the way they try to help certain cases cause them to stand still. For example, a social worker goes to console and encourage a man with one leg, and he says to her, "You can tell me 'Good morning' with two legs, but I with only one." What can she say to him? How can she help him with psychology? If this person isn't helped to understand the

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2. Cf. Jn 6:5 f.

3. Cf. Php 1:21.

deeper meaning of life, he can't be helped at all. He must understand that if he doesn't grumble about this disability permitted by God, he will be storing up a considerable heavenly reward in the other life, so he should be happy. And even if others walked with four legs, he could say, "Thank you God, for making me able to walk even with one leg." But social workers who don't have the necessary spiritual approach go to help and console the sick and don't know what to say to them. For example, a social worker goes to console a thirty-five-year-old woman with cancer who has three young children. What will she tell her? If that mother is not helped to understand the deeper meaning of life, she can easily fall into despair as she thinks of her children's future. The mother's despair is shared by the social worker, if she hasn't understood something spiritually higher, something more profoundly spiritual. If she lacks a profound spiritual awareness and commitment, the social worker won't be able to help in the right way to bring divine consolation to others. So, the poor things tire themselves out physically, but are also emotionally troubled and worried because they can't provide positive help. That is, they have to endure a double portion of weariness.

### *Consider the Good as a Need*

Man must consider the good to be a need, otherwise he will be tormented. And we can't say that some people are unable to understand the good as a need. I cannot justify this, for even a five-year-old child can feel the good as a need. Let's say that a little child has a fever. The parents call the doctor and he tells them to hold the child firmly

while he gives the injection. Later the child, on seeing the doctor, will cry and run away. But if from the beginning they tell the child, "Look, you're sick, you have a fever and you can't go to school or go out to play, while the other children are playing; but if you let the doctor give you a little pinch in the arm the fever will go away and you, too, will be able to go and play," the child will then directly close its eyes and stretch out its arm on his own. What I mean to say is that if the child can understand the good as a need, it's so much more true for an adult.

From the moment someone understands what is right, the matter is settled. Suppose I suddenly say to you, "I'll throw you out of the window." You understand what that means. Even a mentally-challenged person can understand that if someone falls out of a window high above the ground he will break his legs. He understands the difference between level ground and a dangerous cliff; what is good and what is evil. An adult who has read the Gospel, the writings of the Fathers, knows what is right. After that it's only a matter of turning the button. But often you say to people, "Why do you do that? Don't you know it's not right?" And they start, "Well, sadly that's how I am, I don't know why I'm like this, but that's how I was before too..." "Forget what you were before. Right now, as I speak to you, what are you doing to correct yourself?" It's different if they are incapable of understanding. But only an infant child will touch a burning coal instead of candy, because it doesn't understand.

– How did your mother, who was so sensitive and who loved you, manage to give you and your siblings a strict upbringing from your earliest childhood years?

– One can be helped from a young age to grasp the deeper meaning of life and be happy for the right reasons. When I was a young boy I could outrun the other children in the neighbourhood. They didn't want me to race them and would send me away. They called me "the refugee boy". I would then go to my mother in tears. "Why are you crying?" she would ask. "The other children won't let me run," I would say. "You want to run? Here's our yard, run. Why do you want to run there, so others can see you and say bravo? This attitude has pride in it."

Another time I wanted to play with the ball and the children wouldn't let me. Again I went crying to my mother. "What happened, why are you crying again?" she asked. "They won't let me play with the ball," I said. "We have a big yard, you have a ball, play here. Why do you want the other children to see you and admire you? This attitude has pride in it." Then it occurred to me, "My mother is right." Gradually over time I didn't want to run or play ball in front of others, because I realized that this attitude had pride in it and I thought to myself, "These really are useless things; mother is right." After that I got over the problem, and when I saw the other children running and kicking the ball with pride, I would smile and think to myself, "What are they doing?" and I was just a small child in the third grade. From then on I lived a normal and natural life. So now if people ask me, "Would you prefer to climb Mount Athos barefoot in August over the briar leaves, or to go to a ceremony and be dressed with a cloak, and so on?", I will say I prefer to go barefoot up Mount Athos. Now, this I say not out of humility, but because this is what pleases me and gives me peace.

People who have pride were not helped at home in their childhood. The worldly frame of mind is tormenting

for man. And if this isn't noticed and parents don't help their children from a young age, pride then becomes an abiding condition. It's one thing to praise and encourage a child so he doesn't get disappointed, and quite another to fill up his mind with egoism. For example, a child recited a poem but did it poorly and was disappointed. Then the mother can encourage him by saying, "But you did well enough." But if the child says the poem well and the mother begins in front of others to say, "Bravo, yours was the best recitation of all the children; my child is the best", this is wrong and harmful to the child. This is how parents often cultivate pride in their children. Or, to give you another example, a child misbehaves in school and is punished by the teacher. Then the child goes home and tells his parents, "The teacher punished me unfairly." When the father or mother supports the child and says in front of it, "I'll show that teacher; my child is the best...", then the child considers good what he did in school and is eventually tormented by useless things. The important thing is to teach the child a few basic things at home. If one grasps the deeper meaning of life from a young age, then everything goes well. Otherwise, one learns to be pleased with earthly things, with the praises of other men – which do not really please or comfort man – and he remains an earthly human being.

### *Let Us Help People in Repentance*

– Geronda, what can help people most today?

– Today, if people could be taught repentance, this alone would be of great help. By reading as much as we can the lives of Saints which emphasize repentance, we can benefit. To ask for repentance from God means to ask for enlightenment. When we ask for repentance and we repent all the more, naturally we will become more humble and by necessity we will receive more divine Grace, more divine enlightenment. When one is in a state of repentance, he retains the Grace of God. In any case people are good. You see, most people don't confess and don't go to Church; they are terribly ignorant about these things, and yet, on the other hand, they come and ask me for help. There is something in this.

– Geronda, do trials and tribulations become occasions for people to approach God?

– The well-disposed can benefit from the trials and tribulations they may encounter in life. But people who don't have a good disposition have a quarrel with God and curse Him. Unfortunately, they don't say, "I have sinned," but are tormented. The devil has a great deal of authority over people. We have given him many rights over us. Look what modern man has come to! The bad thing is that he himself obstructs divine intervention, because he has no spirit of repentance. If there was repentance, many things would have been corrected. But now we will go through storm after storm. God save us! We must ask for everyone to be granted a spirit of repentance, and for those who deliberately harm the Church and have no intention of correcting themselves; may God grant them repentance before they are taken from this life.

As far as we can, let us help people to repent, so that we may all receive God's blessings. Repentance and confession, that's what we need today. I constantly advise repentance and confession, so that the devil will lose his rights over us and the external demonic influences

will be stopped. People need to be shaken up to understand, to repent. For example, someone confesses that he has committed adultery. The Spiritual Father conveys Christ's forgiveness and imposes a penance, but goes no further. The Spiritual Father must help this person understand that the sin was not just the adultery itself; it also involved other potential crimes such as the break-up of two families. Unfortunately, some Spiritual Fathers do not venture deeper into these spiritual matters to prick the penitent's conscience.

– Geronda, are there people who are good, but who don't go to Church often and don't have a sacramental life in the Church?

– It is possible once in a while to have someone who doesn't go to Church often, but who has devotion and kindness in his soul, thus making room for God to find a dwelling place there. Such people, reinforced by a sacramental life, would make tremendous progress in the spiritual life. On the other hand, there are other people who go to Church, confess, receive Communion, are observant, and yet God finds no room to dwell in them, because they have no humility, no kindness, and no true and authentic repentance. It is not enough to simply make your confession to the Spiritual Father; you must also truly repent of what you have done. Every prayer should begin with a confession before God. But this should not be a mere sentimental confession, relating our sins and then doing the same things all over again. This is not true awareness of our sinfulness. When we become truly conscious of our sins, this is shown by a certain degree of improvement in our spiritual life.

Have you noticed how simply the Israelites prayed to the Lord God? *Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off for ever!*[4] *Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his adversaries backward.*[5] With what simplicity and with what humility, but also with what boldness did they address themselves to God, *What shall we now say to the nations, Lord? You have saved us through the Red Sea and now are we to die in the desert or be slaughtered by foreign enemies? Let us not become a laughing stock to the nations.*[6] We, of course, must be careful not to say any such word to God, "Why are You sleeping, Lord, and don't see what is happening?" He would surely give us a slap in the face as this would be impudent. The Israelites, however, said this with simplicity and humility. They did not blame God for their plight by saying, "Why did You do this?" Rather, they acknowledged their responsibility, "We deserved far greater tribulations, but now how can we answer our enemies who are taunting us if You do not help us?" And you can see how immediately the Lord yielded to their plea. Do you understand? There was acknowledgment of the fault, there was repentance, and the Lord intervened and routed the enemies. If we find ourselves in a difficult situation and don't confront it spiritually, then worldly people will say about us, "Where is your prayer? You say that you pray, but what are you really doing?" We are thus taunted and made a laughing stock.

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[4] Ps 44:23 (Ps 43:24 LXX).

[5] Ps 78:65-66 (Ps 77:65-66 LXX).

[6] Cf. Ex 32:12; Dt 9:28; Ps 79:10 (Ps 78:10 LXX).

### *Repentance Helps to Eradicate Evil*

When we ask for repentance from God for everyone in the world, we must include ourselves among those who have need of repentance and must never say, "Lord, help the people who are sinners." The three Young Men of the Old Testament were born in captivity and yet did not say, "It is not our fault." They actually said, "We are justly suffering for our sins; we deserve to have suffered even more." They spoke as if they themselves had broken God's commandments before the Babylonian captivity; as if they were participants in the sin of their forefathers, even though they had no part, since they weren't even born then. I am so moved by the prayer they offered when placed in the fiery furnace, *For thou art just in all that thou hast done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right... For we have sinfully and lawlessly departed from thee, and have sinned in all things and have not obeyed thy commandments... And now we cannot open our mouths; shame and disgrace have befallen thy servants and worshippers. For thy name's sake do not give us up utterly and do not break thy covenant, and do not withdraw thy mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham thy beloved and for the sake of Isaac thy servant and Israel thy holy one.*[7] In other words, "Lord, You are just in punishing us because we have sinned, but for the sake of Abraham whom You love, as he did not sin, do not abandon us". By including themselves among the sinners and trusting God completely, the three Young Men survived the fiery furnace as a refreshing experience, while the pagan who went near to check things out was consumed by the flames.

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[7] The Prayer of Azariah and the Hymn of the Three Young Men, verses 4-12. In the LXX this is an addition to Daniel, inserted between 3:23 and 3:24.

If one doesn't work like this, he constantly finds excuses, "The devil made me do it." "It's Adam's fault, it's Eve's fault; it's not my fault." A theologian once told me, "Why should we suffer now because of Eve's disobedience?" "My good man," I told him, "does that bother you or prevent you from being saved?" Why blame poor Adam or the unfortunate Eve? They made one mistake and were in Hell for such a long time, while for us Christ has come and redeemed us all. And He has reassured us of His forgiveness, not only seven times but seventy times seven![8] Thousands of times we sin and Christ forgives us, as long as we repent sincerely, and we still dare to say that Adam or Eve is to blame? Notice how they hesitate to give the name Eve – to give the name of Eve to a nun, or at least Zoe, if Eve seems too difficult. In this respect, Eve is indeed wronged. She is our mother, the mother of all the people in the world, and we don't even want to hear her name. The curse in essence was given to the devil by God. *Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.*[9] The devil entered the serpent to deceive man. And yet everyone blames Eve, saying that she brought us down and that we'd have been just fine in Paradise if she hadn't disobeyed. Now if Christ had said to us, "If you sin once, you, too, will go to Hell for so many centuries," then

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[8] Cf. Mt 18:22.
[9] Gen 3:1.

perhaps one might have some grounds for saying something. How ungrateful people can be!

Repentance is of great significance. Man doesn't realize that God's decision can be changed by repentance. This is not a small matter for man to have such power. You've done something wrong? God gives you a slap. You say, "I have sinned." He then stops and gives you blessings. In other words, the unruly child comes to his senses and is tormented by his conscience. Then the Father caresses His child with love and comforts it. Because the Israelites had strayed from God's commandments, they lived in exile for seventy-five years. Finally, when they had repented, Cyrus the king appeared, who one may dare to say proved himself better than the sons of Israel, who had polluted the sacred traditions of their worship of the true God. God changed Cyrus' mind and made him believe in the God of Heaven. Consequently, he set the Israelites free to return to their homeland and provided money and supplies to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Cyrus showed such kindness and devotion that not even the Israelites themselves had shown.[10] And all this happened because the people repented and changed their way of life.[11] You see how much repentance can help in getting rid of evil!

Read all the books of Maccabees; they are very powerful. The king gave an order that the elephants be prepared to trample and kill the Israelites in a bloody ceremony. Five hundred elephants were given handfuls of frankincense and plenty of strong wine to enrage them for the cruel deed. Everybody was waiting for the king to appear, so the ceremony could begin. But the king had forgotten the order he had given. The man in charge of the elephants went to inform the king, who had yet to show up. "Come, O king, we await you. Everything is ready." But the king replied angrily, "Who told you to prepare for such a thing?" And this did not happen once but three times.[12] It was no small matter for the king to forget each time the order he had given repeatedly. And not only this, but in the end he completely changed his attitude toward the Jewish people, who with tears had prayed to their merciful God and Father to avert the danger facing them. True repentance is the key.

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[10] Cf. 1 Esd 1:1 f. (LXX).
[11] Cf. 1 Esd 8:88-92 (LXX).

– Geronda, do the peace organizations established by various countries help in bringing peace to the world?

– It depends. There are some who begin with good intentions. But when all sorts of unrelated people – sorcerers, fire-worshippers, cultic religious types of all persuasions – enter into the mix and attempt to work together, how can there be a common purpose or a common ground for peace? God forgive me, but such things are the devil's rags. Can peace be achieved through sinful association? How can there be peace, when people are not reconciled with God? Only when man is reconciled with God can inward and outward peace come. But for us to be reconciled with God, we must first attain awareness, we must repent, we must live in accordance with God's commandments, and then the Grace and peace of God will enter into us, enabling us to also help create peace around us.

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[12] Cf. 3 Macc 5:1-35.